

THE DOWNTOWN TODAY

Although the basic layout of streets in the downtown is substantially the same as fifty years ago, the downtown area itself is constantly changing. Much of this change is for the better — new buildings, improved streets, new businesses; but the evidence of change is also found in vacant stores, dilapidated buildings and increased conflict between the ever growing numbers of automobiles.

One of the long term trends evident is the gradual shift of more primary retail stores to the Nash side of the railroad tracks. Washington Street, once a bustling center of commerce, has suffered markedly from this trend. Even the stores along East Main Street are showing the effects of the shift.

The railroad is the single most divisive element in the downtown. While the salutary influence of the railroad on the City's past economic growth is recognized, the continued conflict between the railroad and the functioning of the downtown area is increasing, to the detriment of the City.

The presence of the railroad along Main Street is a contributing factor to the decline of the area east of Main Street. The viability of the entire downtown depends on its ability to attract large numbers of people, and to provide efficient and pleasant accommodations for these visitors.

Compact retail areas with short walking distances attract shoppers. However, the primary retail area of Rocky Mount has become a strip along Main Street. Sears is one of the few major stores located more than two hundred feet from Main Street. Many of the stores which front on Main Street have also

opened entrances off Howard Street, although Howard Street itself is congested with cars, service vehicles and a jumble of utility poles and overhead wires.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Poor traffic circulation in the downtown discourages its use by potential shoppers. Three major problems are present in the downtown area:

Through traffic. Traffic passing through the downtown shares the same streets as traffic circulating in the downtown itself. U. S. 64 and U. S. 301 Business channel many motorists into the downtown who wish only to pass through. The railroad. The presence of the railroad frequently blocks east — west traffic on the four streets which join the Nash and Edgecombe sides of the downtown.

Intersections which confuse the motorists. The seven — way intersection at Main, Thomas and Washington streets, and the five — way intersection at Tarboro, Washington and Albemarle are particularly bad. The existing Land Use Map shows other examples of street jogs and angles which hinder safe and efficient traffic movement.

Parking has become a critical problem in the downtown area. The parking study revealed almost 100 percent usage of parking facilities along the block on West Main Street and in some off-street parking lots in the blocks immediately west of Main Street. Parking facilities located several blocks from the main concentration of shops are necessary for employee parking, but they will not attract the motorists who wish to shop or transact business on Main Street.

FUTURE SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Space requirements were projected to provide for a downtown to serve a 1985 Rocky Mount urban area of 75,000 population. Existing and future floor space requirements (in square feet) are given below.

	Primary Commercial	Secondary Commercial	Service and Repair Space	Total
Existing	234,788	411,642	272,250	918,680
Future	653,400	304,920	435,600	1,393,920

Parking facilities to overcome present deficiencies and accommodate anticipated 1985 demands are shown below.

	All-Day	Transient	Total
Existing Spaces	571	856	1427
Future Space Demands	1565	3037	4602*

*Plus 500 spaces for Convention Center.